

The SABLE

By HORACE HAZELTINE

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SYNOPSIS.

Robert Cameron, capitalist, consults Philip Clyde, newspaper publisher, regarding anonymous threatening letters he has received. The first promises a sample of the writer's power on a certain day. On that day the head is mysteriously cut from a portrait of Cameron while the latter is in the room. Clyde has a theory that the portrait was mutilated while the room was unoccupied and the head later removed by means of a string, unnoticed by Cameron. Evelyn Grayson, Cameron's niece, with whom Clyde is in love, finds the head of Cameron's portrait nailed to a tree, where it was had been used as a target. Clyde pledges Evelyn to secrecy. Clyde learns that a Chinese boy employed by Philipus Murphy, an artist living nearby, had borrowed a rifle from Cameron's lodgekeeper. Clyde makes an excuse to call on Murphy and is repulsed. He pretends to be investigating alleged infractions of the game laws and speaks of finding the bowl of an opium pipe under the tree where Cameron's portrait was found. The Chinese boy is found dead next morning. While visiting Cameron in his dressing room a Nell O'Connor is mysteriously strangled. Cameron becomes seriously ill as a result of the shock. The third letter appears mysteriously on Cameron's desk. It makes direct threats against the life of Cameron. Clyde tells Cameron the envelope was empty. He tells Evelyn everything and plans to take Cameron on a yacht trip. The yacht picks up a fisherman found drifting helplessly in a boat. He gives the name of Johnson. Cameron disappears from yacht while Clyde's back is turned.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"There's no other explanation," he decided, conclusively.

"You mean he's committed suicide?"

"Call it what you like, sir."

"But there was no reason for him to do such a thing," I objected.

"I understand he's been pretty ill, sir."

"He was ill, yes. But he was on the road to recovery." And then, with the realization that I was speaking of Cameron in the past tense, as though I were already settled that I should never see him alive again, a shiver of horror swept over me. I know MacLeod observed it, for he said:

"There's been a drop in the temperature in the last half-hour. I'll be more comfortable in my cabin, sir, if you don't mind coming in, and talking the thing over a bit."

"Good Heavens, MacLeod," I exclaimed, turning on him with nervous savagery, "do you expect me to sit down and talk calmly at such a moment? I can't. It's all I can do to stand still here, for a minute at a time. I feel I must do something. It's torture to have one's hands tied this way."

"I think I know how you feel, sir. But walking the deck will do you good, and if you could calm yourself enough to talk it over quietly, we might get down to something that would guide us, so to speak."

"Guide us?" I repeated.

"Yes, sir. It's not impossible, you know, sir, that when he went overboard he was picked up."

The light from his cabin porthole illuminated us both, and now as he looked at me he must have seen my perplexity.

"You said yourself, sir," he explained, "that you thought you heard the exhaust of some sort of craft not far away."

It was this reminder, I think, which brought back my woolgathering wife and steeled me to a perception of the real importance of the captain's plea. Of one thing, at least, I was assured: Cameron was not a suicide. How he could have gone over the taffrail without my seeing or hearing him, I should never be able to understand. But gone he was, and it lay upon me to discover by whose assistance this marvelous disappearance was accomplished. And so it came about that, controlling my futile unrest, I was presently seated in MacLeod's swivel chair, while he, from a place on the side of his berth, fired pointed questions at me, which I either answered as best I could or returned in kind.

"Now maybe it's none of my business, Mr. Clyde, but in view of tonight's occurrence I think it's pertinent to know why there was such a thorough inspection of the Sibylla before we sailed, and such a lot of caution regarding the crew." That was the first of his volleys, and for a moment it staggered me. I recognized, however, that this was not a time for quibbling, and as MacLeod had been for years a staunch soldier in Cameron's army of employees, I saw no harm in letting him know the truth.

"I'll tell you," I returned, frankly, "but it's not to go any further. In the past nine weeks Mr. Cameron has been receiving a series of threatening anonymous letters. The last one came a week ago today; and in it this was named as the date for the climax."

"Climax?" he repeated, questioning.

"Yes. Today, the letter stated, Mr. Cameron would disappear."

The calm, phlegmatic young captain did not start. He simply narrowed his eyes in thought.

"That's odd," he said, gravely, "damned odd." And then, after a second's consideration, he asked: "Was that—but of course it was—why he took this course?"

"No," I told him. "That was not his reason, though it was mine."

"I did not mean to be enigmatic, but I suppose I was, for MacLeod showed

plainly enough that he failed to understand.

"You see," I went on, in elucidation, "Mr. Cameron did not know about this last threat. He was ill when the letter came, and we kept it from him."

It was evident to me that the captain disapproved, but he held his peace.

"What were the previous threats?" he asked, presently.

"Nothing definite," I answered. "Simply that on certain fixed days the writers would demonstrate their power."

"And did they?"

"Most marvelously."

Again MacLeod was silent for a space.

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Clyde, don't you think it would have been better if you'd told me about this?"

"Mr. Cameron was very anxious that no one should know."

The captain compassed his right knee with his left hand.

"All the same," he said, "he'd never have been split off this yacht if I'd known what was in the wind."

This statement annoyed me, and I resented it.

"What could you have done?" I asked. "I was with him almost continuously."

There came a strange, half-meditative, half-bell look in the man's eyes, and I was wondering what it portended, when, quite ignoring my question, he began speaking:

"You see there oughtn't to be any misunderstanding between you and me, sir. This is too serious a business to be bungled because I am only captain of this yacht and you are the owner's friend. So, if I speak plainly, sir, you'll understand why, and not think me disrespectful."

I smiled to reassure him, still puzzled, and added:

"Go straight ahead, captain. You are perfectly right."

"Well," he began, "I'll tell you, Mr. Clyde. Your story, as you told it to me, has some weak points in it. You say, for instance, that you were with Mr. Cameron almost continuously. Now I'm not mentioning the little while you were in here, early in the evening, but during the last quarter of an hour before you gave the alarm, you weren't with him, either."

I stared at the speaker for an instant in absolute dumb amazement.

"I don't know why you say that," I said, at length, more hurt than angered. "I told you that from the moment I last spoke to him, seated beside him there on the after-deck, until I turned from the rail and found him gone, not more than two minutes elapsed. And that was God's truth."

"You said you were listening for what you thought sounded like a motor boat, didn't you?"

"I did."

"And you were leaning over the taffrail, looking for it, weren't you?"

"I was."

"But you didn't see it?"

"No, I didn't see it; and I couldn't hear it after the first few seconds."

The captain had fixed a gaze on me that seemed aimed to penetrate to my soul's fiber. After my answer he was silent a moment. Then he said:

"Where were you, Mr. Clyde, when that boat—motor, tug, or whatever she was—crossed within ten feet of the dory we are towing?"

Had he struck me in the face I could not have been more dumfounded.

"What do you mean?" were the only words that came to me.

"I mean that the craft you have been talking about came up and went astern of us, ten or twelve minutes before you gave the alarm that Mr. Cameron had vanished under your eyes. I was on the bridge and saw it myself—just a black shape, without lights, and her exhaust muffled, just as you say. You tell me that you and Mr. Cameron had been sitting there for three hours, at least; that you heard seven bells strike; that it was not more than fifteen or twenty minutes after this that you got up and went to the rail, and that you only stood there two minutes."

"I told you all of that, and every word is the truth," I insisted, vehemently.

"And yet," he retorted accusingly, "and yet—eight bells had struck before you gave the alarm."

I had not thought of the time. In my panic it had not occurred to me, of course, to ascertain the hour and minute. But Captain MacLeod knew. At sea they work by clock. At eight bells the watch had changed.

"My dear fellow," I exclaimed rising, "you certainly cannot for a moment suspect me of complicity."

He stood up, too; imperturbable. "I just want those things explained, that's all," was his reply.

"And I can't explain them," I told him, candidly. "You say you saw the boat. I didn't. You say it was after midnight when I came to you. It may have been. I don't know. It may have been nearer twelve, when I

went to the rail. My impression is that it was not. I'll admit it is mysterious. The whole awful thing is mysterious."

My candor seemed to relieve him.

"Well, Mr. Clyde," he said, with equal sincerity, "maybe I was out-spoken, but I wanted to know what you'd say to the points that were puzzling me."

"You did perfectly right," I told him. "As you have said, there must be no secrets between us." And then, as I resumed my seat, I asked: "What about the fisherman? He hasn't evaded his guard, has he?"

MacLeod sat down again too.

"He's in where I put him, now," he answered with a shade of reluctance. "But—I'm not sure; it's almost as mysterious as the other—but I could have sworn I saw him come up that forward hatchway and go sneaking aft while I was on the bridge."

"When was that?" I pressed, eagerly.

"About a quarter of twelve."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing, just then. I waited. And while I was waiting I saw that black, spooky craft come out of the dark, and go skimming astern of us. A little after eight bells I came down from the bridge—I stopped there for just a minute to have a word with Brandon when he came up—and then I went myself to look after Johnson. The fisherman was in a bunk sound asleep, and the man swore he had been lying there snoring, for the past two hours. Who was it came up the ladder twenty minutes ago?" I asked. He looked at me as if he thought I was gone suddenly loony. "Before the watch changed?" he asked. I nodded. "Not a soul came or went," he said, "since I been here."

"And the boat without lights?" I questioned. "Did you inquire about her? Who else saw her?"

"I asked the lookouts; but—well, no, sir—and that's a very strange to me—neither of them saw her. I gave them both a rating. If they weren't asleep I don't see how they could have missed her."

The thing was growing more and more baffling. MacLeod was the last man to be accused of imaginative fancies. He was thoroughly in earnest in what he had told me; and yet for neither of his statements had he the smallest corroboration. For my own part I was sure that, at the time he mentioned, no vessel of any description had passed anywhere near us.

"What did you make the craft out to be?"

"Well, sir, I couldn't say exactly. She was in sight only a minute, coming in range of our own lights. She looked more like a tug than anything else; but she had more speed than any tug I ever saw. She hadn't the lines of a yacht."

"She wasn't a pilot boat?"

"Oh, no, sir. New York pilots don't cruise this far east, and the Boston pilots wouldn't be so far away from home either."

I offered the captain a cigar, which he declined, filling his pipe in preference. When I lighted a cigar myself, I asked:

"I suppose you have some theory, MacLeod. You don't seriously think it was suicide?"

As usual he was slow to answer. After a thoughtful second, he said:

"I'd be sorry to think that, Mr. Clyde. Taking into consideration what you told me about the threat, and connecting that boat with it, it looks—"

"It's not in possibility," he went on, after a second, "that they could have plucked him off with a line. But if that fellow I saw going aft—Oh, Lord, no, sir! It's past me to see a way out. All the same, we are keeping that craft in sight, and if we can only get thirty knots out of the Sibylla again, we'll find out what she is and what her business is, before morning."

CHAPTER X.

A Woman of Intuition.

His tidings, always a heavy burden, never weighed more heavily on any one than on me that dismal, rainy Sunday morning, on which I stepped from the Sibylla's launch to the stone water steps of Cragholt. For two days we had searched the bays and inlets from Provincetown to Plymouth and from Stiasconet to Providence; questioning at every pier and landing stage; making inquiry in every town and hamlet; but without a thimbleful of profit for our pains. As that black craft, with dimmed lights and muffled engines, had eluded our pursuit on the night of Cameron's disappearance, so for forty-eight hours succeeding she had baffled our quest. No one knew her; no one had seen her.

As for that shaken, frayed, pallid fisherman, Peter Johnson, he appeared below, rather than above, suspicion. In my knowledge of men went for anything he was too inferior both mentally and physically to be a participant in any such plot as was here involved. He seemed to me woefully

weak and wasted, and with as little brains as sinew. So, with enough money for a new mast and sail, we had put him and his dory ashore at our first landing, and had forthwith forgotten him.

MacLeod had been inclined to continue the search, but I argued that any further efforts in that direction would be only a waste of time. The craft we were looking for might have come from any one of a thousand places and returned to any one of a thousand more. Some more effective, general and far-reaching steps must be taken, I held, and taken quickly. Indeed I felt now that to keep secret longer the conspiracy, as indicated in those mystic letters, would be little short of criminal. The aid of the police and the press must be invoked at once, and nothing left undone to trace the crime to its source.

But my first and most onerous task was to acquaint Evelyn Grayson with the facts as I knew them. How I shrank from that duty is beyond anything I can put into words. I know it would have been far easier for me to have carried her definite news of her uncle's death. What I had to tell was horrible in its stark obscurity. And yet, if I could have foreseen just what was to follow, I might have spared myself a goodly share of distress.

I imagined I knew Evelyn Grayson, before this. I thought I had sounded the profundities of her fortitude and courage on the night that I spread before her and read with her that third and last letter. But my fancy did her an injustice. She was even more of a woman than I dreamed.

Recently I chanced upon these lines by Thomas Dunn English, which must have been inspired by such a one as she:

So much is clear,
Though little dangers they may fear,
Then women show a front of iron;
And, gentle in their manner, they
Do bold things in a quiet way.

Evelyn Grayson did a bold thing in a quiet way that morning. I have not yet forgotten how marble white she was, and yet how bravely she came, with springing step and lifted chin and fearless eyes. I had waited her coming in the music room, with its score of reminders of happy evenings in which he had participated. The chair he usually chose, in the corner, near the great bow window against which the east wind was now driving the rain in gusty splashes, took on a pathos which moved me to weakness. The Baudelaire lyric, spread open, lay upon the music rack of the piano, stirred memories scarcely less harrowing. A photograph, an ash tray, a paper knife, all commonplace objects of themselves, but so linked to him by association, became, suddenly, instruments of emotional torture.

In this environment, under these influences, I rose to meet her, wordless. Yet my expression and attitude must have spoken loudly enough to confirm the dread that was in her heart, for even before she spoke I was sure that she knew. And then she had taken my two outstretched hands in hers and raised her brave eyes to mine, and low-voiced, but sure and tremulous, was saying:

"I feared it, Philip. From the very first, I feared it."

And when I told her all, to the smallest detail, it was as though she were the man and I the woman; for the recital had been for me a very painful confession of my own incompetence, and its conclusion left me more nervously unstrung than at any time since the night of the strange catastrophe. With what heroic fortitude she heard the narrative may best be indicated by the statement that throughout it all she sat calmly attentive, but unquestioning, and with no sign of emotion beyond her continued pallor and a recurrent tensing of her small white hands. At the end I leaned forward and with left elbow on knee rested my forehead in my palm. She sat beside me on the same settee; and now she drew closer, and laying her cool right hand over my own disengaged one, began stroking my hair with her left. For a full minute she said nothing. Then, in soothing accents:

"I am glad you didn't find the boat. That means he is on it. If you had found it, it would have been some ordinary thing having no connection with this affair, whatever."

It was odd reasoning, but very feminine, and in an easterly way, forceful.

"But you made one mistake, Philip," she went on. "You should not have let that fisherman, Peter Johnson, go."

At this I raised my head and regarded her with something like astonishment.

"He was one of them," she explained in a tone of conviction.

"How can you say that?" I asked, a little nettled. It annoyed me that she should be so positive, knowing no more of the man than that which I had told her.

"I feel it," she answered. And that was all the reason she could give.

I had not expected to find such development of intuition regarding worldly matters in one so young, and so fresh from conventual seclusion. And then her judgment seemed to keep pace with her auguries; for when I spoke of inviting the aid of detectives and the newspapers, she begged me to consider.

"I am afraid for him," she pursued gravely. "Publicity might mean death. If they discover they are being sought, they may murder him. Somehow, I feel he is still alive; and so we must do nothing that will incite them to further violence."

"But," I returned, conscious of the force of her argument, yet failing to see how this caution could very well be exercised, "we can't find him without seeking."

"No, but we can seek him in secret. The newspapers must not tell the world."

"The police would of course tell the newspapers," I added.

"We can do some things, without the police," was her next assertion. "There are some things that I can do; and there are more that you can do. She was thoughtful for a moment, and then: 'I am so sorry about Peter Johnson! You should never have lost sight of him.'"

"We gave him money and God speed," I reminded her.

"Captain MacLeod must go back there, where you left him. Where was it? Stiasconet? He must trace him. His trail won't lead to Gloucester, I'm sure of that."

My self-esteem was not being vigorously stimulated by the young lady at this juncture. Indeed, I was being made to feel more and more my strategic inferiority.

"And I," she continued, with the methodical expediency of a commandeer-in-chief, so curiously inapposite in one so young and inexperienced as she: "and I shall find out about those letters."

"Find out what?" I asked in astonishment.

"Find out what manner of man wrote them," she amplified.

"But how can you?" I inquired. "That seems a pretty big undertaking of itself, for one so small."

"I have thought of a way," she declared, noncommittally.

"And what am I to do?" was my next question, feeling miserably small beside this efficient child.

"You must give me the letter you have, and help me look for the others."

The first part of the command was easy enough of obedience; for the letter was in my pocket at the moment. But my assistance in searching for the first two communications was more energetic than successful. Together we ransacked desks, bureaus, tables, closets, trunks, clothes. Indeed, every possible hiding place both at Cragholt and on the Sibylla was carefully and systematically delved into and exhausted without reward. Either Cameron had destroyed the letters, or he had them on his person when he vanished from the yacht.

At Evelyn's request, however, I wrote copies of those two strangely couched, malevolent epistles, as nearly as I could remember them; and save, perhaps, for possibly two or three verbal errors they were, I think, quite accurate.

"And now," I asked again, "what am I to do?"

It was nearly midnight, and I was leaving her, my car waiting in the sopping driveway to carry me home.

"You are not to worry any more than you possibly can help," she told me, with a brave little smile, "for we are going to succeed. And tomorrow you must go to your office, and keep very, very silent about what has happened. And then you are to come to me again in the evening, and I will tell you all I have learned."

With which she gave me her hand to kiss, in the odd little French way she had—a way that could scarcely have been a part of her convent teaching.

As I came to review these matters now, it seems singular that I should have so readily consented to be guided by this girl's will in a case of such grave importance; yet I cannot but believe there was something providential both in her assumption of leadership and in my own unquestioning acquiescence. For the day of office work and silence, which she enjoined, was exactly what I needed to restore my nerves to their normal tension. It was, in fact, a sort of counter-irritant, which brought me up standing, with a revived self-confidence and recuperated energy.

So when, a little before five o'clock that afternoon, just as I was making ready to run for my train, I heard Evelyn's voice over the telephone, I was fairly tingling with ardor for the game; and her request to call on Professor Griffin, the expert in Oriental literature, who occupied a chair in Columbia college, and lived a mile or more back from the Greenwich station, was a welcome call to action.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CROWN GALL AND WOOLLY APHIS ARE TWO COMMON DISEASES INJURIOUS TO TREES

Ignorance on Part of Many Orchardists Has Resulted in Great Loss—Particular Care Should Be Used to Plant Only Clean Stock—There is No Effective Treatment Known.

(BY ERNEST WALKER.)

During the past year a great deal of nursery stock has been sold to farmers and fruit growers which later developments showed was affected by various diseases of which the buyer was entirely ignorant. Crown gall and woolly aphis are two very common diseases found on young orchard trees.

An orchardist who set out an orchard 15 years ago told the writer, on learning the nature of crown gall, that he remembered noticing it on the trees and was confident half his trees were affected with galls like the sample when set, though at that time he was ignorant of the nature of the disease. In reply to a question as to how the trees had done, he reported that they have never "done much."

Crown gall is found on peach, almond, apple, pear, raspberry, rose, and similar growths on various other plants, but whether the organism is the same in all instances is as yet undetermined. It is known to affect seedlings as well as grafted trees, and the disease can be communicated by direct inoculation. It has been shown that crushed galls placed in the soil in which seeds are planted will produce the disease on the seedlings. The disease is therefore contagious. There is evidence to show that on trees transplanted to the orchard the galls continue to grow, forming ultimately large warts. When they girdle the trunk they interfere with the movement of sap. Young trees often die of the disease. The galls of varying sizes affect the base of the trunk, the larger roots, and sometimes occur on

grown among those affected with a crown gall should have the roots dipped in Bordeaux mixture as a precaution before setting them in the orchard.

Woolly aphis seems to be everywhere present on the roots of orchard trees, as well as very common on nursery stock.

Young or old trees, badly affected by woolly-aphis are apt to bear a feeble appearance. The leaves will appear pale and yellowish. The insect is especially injurious to young trees. If the tree lives a few years they will likely manage to get along

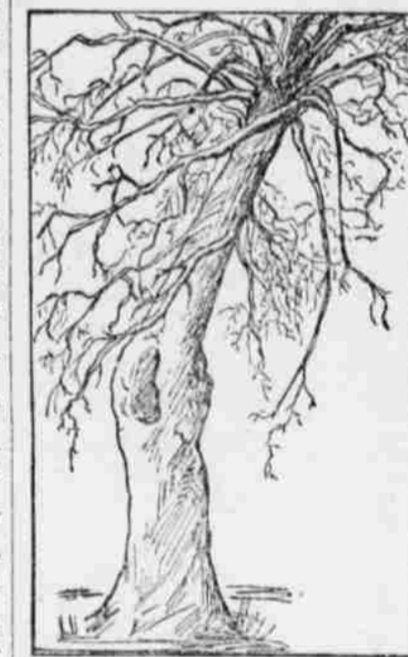


Knotty Roots Caused by Woolly Aphis. The Smaller Trees Are One Year Trees, the Larger Are Two Year Trees.

in spite of the injury caused by the insect. Most of the insects confine their attention to the roots, where they will commonly be found at all seasons on roots to a depth of a foot or more, but some of them infest the bark of the trunk, or branches and shoots coming from the roots. They are often seen about the margins of wounds, or at the forks of branches, where while finding food they are more or less protected. There is a downy cotton-like secretion from the body of the insect, which gives a mass of them the appearance of bluish white mold. The insect multiplies throughout the milder parts of the year by the birth of living young, which are produced asexually from wingless females. So the soil becomes fairly lousy with them in time. The insect spreads rapidly toward the approach of winter by the appearance of a generation of winged females which fly about, assisted in their travels by the winds. The result is a wide distribution of the insect. These in turn bring forth a generation of males and females. A winter egg is soon deposited on the bark of the tree in some crevice. It hatches in the following spring, and a new colony is soon started.

Particular care should be used to plant only clean stock. Nursery trees showing much injury by woolly aphis should not be planted. Trees from among infested stock should be treated by dipping the roots in kerosene emulsion, containing about ten per cent. of kerosene, after dilution. Dipping the roots for a few seconds in water maintained at a temperature of 135 degrees Fahrenheit is an effective simple treatment, when it can conveniently be done. Special care should be taken to protect trees the first few years.

Buyers of nursery stock should insist upon having a proper official certificate of inspection with all trees purchased, as a safeguard against diseased trees.



Injury to Tree Allowed Entrance to Insects.

the stem above the surface of the soil. Affected trees show signs of starvation, yellowish foliage and enfeebled growth.

There is no effective treatment known. All familiar with the disease recommend the destruction of diseased nursery stock. Nursery lands in which disease has gained a footing should be used for farm or other crops for three years or more. Apparently healthy trees which have

KNACK OF FEEDING MUST BE LEARNED

Long Established Custom Among Poultrymen to Feed Hens Wet Mash Every Day.

(BY OSCAR ERF.)

There is a knack in feeding hens that must be learned by experience. The hens must be well fed and yet should always be a little hungry. During the day they are not to be at any time satisfied, but in the evening they may be fed all they will clean up in half an hour. It is a long-established custom with poultrymen to feed hens a wet mash once a day. This may be fed in the morning or in the evening, according to convenience. Evening feeding is preferred by most people. Where meat and green food are well provided, the mash can be dropped out of the bill of fare entirely and its place supplied by a greater variety of grain food.

The method of feeding grain usually suggested for winter practice is to feed in straw or other litter. A place to scratch not only provides the much-needed exercise, but keeps the hens contented, warm and healthy. The finer the grain, the more often the feeding, and the deeper the litter, the greater will be the exercise the hen must take in finding her daily allowance of food. Large breeds and old hens must be forced to exercise more vigorously than smaller hens or pullets.

Examine the hens, and, if they are excessively fat, enforce more exercise. Legions are by nature active and restless and will take plenty of exercise if given half a chance. Comfort and freedom from disturbance of any sort are essential to the best results with laying hens.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ERADICATION OF APPLE DISEASE

Bitter Rot Is Constant Menace to Grower—Varies Greatly in Virulence.

(BY WALTER B. LEUTZ.)

In sections where bitter rot is known to occur, the disease is a constant menace to the apple grower. It varies greatly in virulence in different years, sometimes being so destructive as to destroy the crop over large areas. It seldom bothers the fruit of early apples, as it does not appear on the fruit until mid-summer. It attacks the limbs, however, and forms cankers from which the spores are given off early in the season. The cankers are sunken areas of the bark which are dark in color, adhere closely to the underlying wood and more or less cracked. These areas produce the spores from which the disease is spread.

Remove these cankered limbs in pruning. Where the canker is small and on a large, vigorous limb, pare off the dead bark with the pruning knife, and paint the wound. Spray the trees at least four times the next season with bordeaux mixture.

Make Poultry Posts Secure. See to it that the posts of the chicken fence are not rotted off so that they will fall over in the winter storms and twist the poultry fence all out of shape. Better reset such posts now and keep the fence from being ruined.

Small Fruits. If we cultivate small fruits, have plenty of interesting work on the farm, this will tend to keep the young men at home.